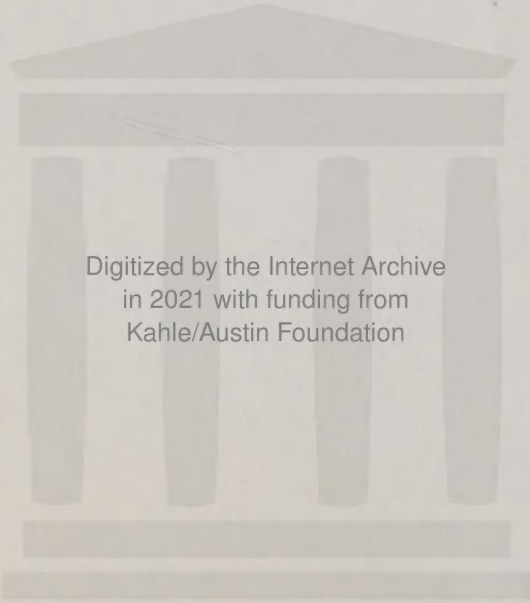


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PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSE OF VEDANTA

BY

SWAMI PARAMANANDA

Author of "The Way of Peace and Blessedness"
"The Path of Devotion" "Vedanta in Practice"
"Soul's Secret Door" "Rhythm of Life"
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PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSE OF VEDANTA

INTRODUCTORY.

A true principle is that which cannot be influenced by time, space or causation. Any fundamental truth can stand equally the test of all ages, because truth is self-existent and not limited by or dependent on country, nation or individual authority. Neither can it be the exclusive property of any one people or period. "There is no true existence of the unreal and the real can never be non-existent; the Seers of Truth know the nature of both." (Bhagavad Gita) Therefore whatever truth has shone in the remote past will be equally true today and also for the ages to come. Any culture, whether physical, mental or spiritual,

which has once been attained by human efforts, will always be attainable by others who come after.

Truth stands, not on vain assertions or imaginations, but on the testimony of wise Seers of all ages and climes. Therefore, however vague or dim an ideal may become, it cannot die, but reveals itself again and again through the mighty characters, who seek the realization of the Real. Not a single truth is ever lost. It may for a time be hidden under superstition and prejudice, but it shines forth effulgently once more when the right opportunity comes. Thus the fundamental principles of the Vedas, the illumined philosophy and religion of the Aryans, may have been many times dimmed and looked upon as mere legends, but have they been thereby less effective to guide human souls to the ultimate goal of truth and wisdom?

VEDANTA AND ITS ORIGIN.

Vedanta comes from two Sanskrit words, *Veda* (wisdom) and *anta* (end), and means "end of wisdom" or supreme wisdom. It is the name given to the teachings of the Vedas, which have been handed down to us from time immemorial. The special feature of Vedanta is that it is free from all sectarian and exclusive ideas and for that reason it has infinite scope for tolerance. It is not based on any personality, but on principles; therefore it is the common property of the whole human race. Sincere study likewise enables us to recognize that all the noble moral and spiritual teachings of the Greek, German and other Western philosophies are neither new nor original, but are to be found in Vedanta; because Vedanta itself is the revelation of the fundamental principles of the universe.

It springs, not from any human, but from a divine source. It represents no special books or doctrines, but explains the eternal facts of nature. It stands as the record of the direct spiritual perception of the ancient Rishis or Seers of Truth, who were not the founders of a religion or philosophy, but the revealers of the eternally-existing laws of the universe. As the law of gravity did not originate with Sir Isaac Newton, so also these laws did not originate with the Rishis, but had existed from the beginning of time and had undoubtedly been discovered by previous Seers of Truth, for the Vedas as we know them are full of references to still earlier authorities. Thus we see that the principles of Vedanta run in parallel line with creation itself; and as creation is eternal, so are these principles.

CONCEPTION OF GOD.

As the source of all these principles Vedanta recognizes one Supreme Being, one law, one essence, whom sages call *Satchidanandam*, "Existence-Absolute, Knowledge-Absolute, Bliss-Absolute." Out of that one substance comes the manifestation of these manifold phenomena. "He is the thread on which the different pearls of various colors and shapes are strung together." God the Absolute is this thread or essence. He dwells in the heart of every being as consciousness; from the minutest atom to the greatest of mortals, He is present everywhere. In Him we live and move and have our being. Without Him there cannot be anything. He is one without a second. There cannot be more than one infinite Being, since infinity means limitless, boundless, secondless. Such is the Vedic conception of

God, and the realization of this God is the ultimate goal of its teaching.

GOD PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL.

Although the Supreme Being is one, He appears before us in many forms. As it is said in the Rig-Veda, "Truth is one, wise men call It by various names (and worship It under different forms according to their comprehension)." Herein lies the secret of tolerance, which constitutes the special characteristic of Vedanta. An Infinite Being must have infinite paths leading to Him. These infinite names, forms and paths are to suit the varying tendencies of His innumerable children. Therefore He is sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal. Those who seek to realize Him as an impersonal or abstract ideal, following the path of philosophic discrimination, see Him in the Self and the

Self in all beings. Through this they transcend all human limitations and find absolute peace and bliss in oneness.

“When the knower of Self finds all beings within himself, how can there be any more sorrow or delusion for him who sees this oneness.” (Upanishads).

To those who cannot follow the abstract ideal, He appears as a personal God, a God of infinite love, infinite beauty, the source of all blessed qualities. With these He establishes the personal relationship of loving Mother, loving Father, Child, or Friend; and one who sincerely strives through this path of personal worship with true love and devotion also attains the realization of the Supreme. For it must always be remembered that the worship of the personal or impersonal takes us to the same goal. “Whoever comes to Me (the Lord) by whatsoever path, I reach Him. All men

are struggling through paths which ultimately lead to Me." (Bhagavad Gita)

MAN'S RELATION TO GOD.

According to the teaching of Vedanta, this realization of God, or at-onement with Him, is the aim of human life; nay, it is our birthright. Forgetfulness of our true nature or Godhood is the source of all misery. There is no real difference between *Jivatman* (individual self) and *Paramatman* (the Supreme Self), except that the individual has taken a covering of limitations on him in the shape of name, form and various qualities, while the Supreme Self dwells beyond these. It is the same conscious spirit which exists in both; only in one case it shines partially, owing to limitation, and in the other it shines fully and freely. So when through purity and wisdom man finds his real Self, then this

veil drops off and man and God become one and inseparable. "The knower of Brahman (Truth) becomes one with Him;" or as Jesus said, "I and my Father are one."

This relation of man to God has been clearly set forth in one of the Upanishads thus: Two inseparable birds of golden plumage are sitting on the same tree; one eats the fruits of the tree, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter; the other, not tasting the fruit, sits above as witness, calm, majestic and merged in his own glory. So the *Jiva* (individual Self) and God (the Supreme Self) are sitting on the tree of life. The *Jiva*, after tasting the different fruits of experience, both sweet and bitter, and grieving over his own impotence, becomes bewildered; but when he looks upon the other bird—the Lord, beholds His mightiness and realizes that they are

really one, then his sorrow and delusion pass away. This vision of the Self removes all sense of duality and the One shines alone as the infinite, omnipotent Being.

Man can never be robbed of this divine birthright. No amount of wrongdoing can ever destroy it. His misdeeds may cause delusion and make him suffer, but after going through many experiences, both sweet and bitter, he is sure at last to find his divinity and be freed from all bondage.

LAW OF KARMA.

Though we all possess the same germ of divinity within us, yet we are not all equal. What is the cause of this inequality? Why is one born happy and another miserable, one intelligent and another dull? The difference lies in the degree of manifestation or unfoldment

of the same divine power, which makes one great in wisdom and enables him to go through the varying conditions of life with courage and serenity, while another, whose mind is veiled, constantly makes mistakes and suffers. God does not send happiness to one soul and grief to another arbitrarily. "The All-pervading One partaketh neither of the evil nor of the good of any creature. Wisdom is covered by ignorance, thus mortals are deluded."

The Hindus do not blame an invisible Providence for all the suffering in this world, but explain it through the natural law of cause and effect. If a man is born fortunate or wretched, there must be some reason for it; if therefore we cannot find the cause for it in this life, it must have occurred in some previous existence, since no effect is possible without a cause. All the good that comes to

us is what we have earned through our own effort; and whatever evil there is, is the result of our own past mistakes. As, moreover, our present has been shaped by our past, so our future will be moulded by our present. This brings great hope and comfort, since what we ourselves make, we can also unmake. Therefore, instead of grieving over our past mistakes, if we direct our present energies with whole-hearted earnestness towards counteracting the results of past actions, we can make our future better and brighter.

This is the law of Karma, which in accounting for all the inequalities among human beings on natural grounds, does not make God partial or unjust.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.

The idea of reward and punishment also springs from this law. Whatever

we sow, we must reap. It cannot be otherwise. An apple tree cannot be produced out of a mango seed, nor a mango from an apple seed. If a person spends all his life in evil-thinking and wrongdoing, then it is useless for him to look for happiness hereafter; because our hereafter is not a matter of chance, but follows as the reaction of our present action. Similarly a man of virtuous deeds must reap as their result happiness, which none can take away from him. The nature of sin, which may be defined as the sum-total of all our unkind and selfish thoughts and deeds, is to make the veil which separates us from God thicker. The nature of virtue is to make this veil thinner and thinner. And since God is the source of all bliss, the one must inevitably bring physical and mental suffering, while the other must bring peace and joy.

We should, however, never lose sight of the fact that all these ideas of reward and punishment exist in the realm of relativity or finiteness. No soul can ever be doomed eternally through his finite evil deeds; for the cause and effect must always be equal. Thus we can see through our common sense that the theory of eternal perdition and eternal heaven is impossible and illogical, since no finite action can create an infinite result. Hence according to Vedanta, the goal of mankind is neither temporal pleasure nor pain, but *Mukti* or absolute freedom; and each soul is consciously or unconsciously marching towards this goal through the various experiences of life and death.

REINCARNATION.

The theory of evolution is entirely based on the law of Karma, for it is

evident that something cannot evolve out of nothing. This law also offers a satisfactory and logical explanation for all the physical and mental tendencies which we have at birth. Whenever a man is born with any extraordinary power and wisdom, know that he possessed it even before coming into this body; because we do not acquire any power or quality accidentally, but all our knowledge and ability are based on past experiences or series of causes. So also is it with one who from his very birth is devoid of proper physique or intellectual faculties.

According to the theory of Reincarnation every soul passes through the various experiences of births and rebirths until it attains its original perfection. Each time a soul is born here it brings with it the fruit of all its previous existence, which determines its

character and environment in this life. Since these are the result of a man's own effort, it cannot be said that he inherits his virtuous or vicious tendencies from his parents, but souls are drawn to that environment which is in accordance with their merits and best suited for their growth. As furthermore like attracts like, so we often find children and parents resembling one another.

Vedanta recognizes that the theory of evolution is not complete if confined only to material phenomena. It must also extend through the higher realms of man's spiritual consciousness. Each individual has within him the germ of perfection, which does not reach its full unfoldment with the attainment of a human body or in one life-time. Therefore it is necessary for the embodied soul to continue to evolve through manifold experiences of pleasure and pain until this germ has

reached its full manifestation of spiritual consciousness. The object of our coming into human life is to gain self-knowledge and when that is attained the bond of slavery breaks forever, man becomes divine and does not have to come here again like a slave. The theory of Reincarnation, as we thus see, is nothing more than the theory of evolution carried to its logical conclusion.

IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

The immortality of the soul is another fundamental principle of the Vedanta philosophy. The Self of man is not subject to change, nay, it is birthless and deathless. Birth, death and all that lies between have to do only with the physical body, which has beginning and must necessarily come to an end. They do not touch the soul. "The Self is not born, neither does It die, nor having

been does It cease to exist. Unborn, eternal, unchangeable, ever-existent, It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed." (Bhagavad Gita)

Body decays, but not the soul, which only dwells within the body and permeates it with life and consciousness, but which is not tainted by any bodily action or condition any more than the sun is affected by the dust-covered window through which it shines. For a true Seer the body is only a dwelling-house or an instrument which he uses for the attainment of his original state of God-consciousness. Death is nothing but going from one house to another, until the soul has freed itself from attachment to ephemeral things and gained its release from the bonds of Karma. Karma has no power over the real Self. It binds only the apparent or external man, who identifies himself with nature and

thus comes under the law of action and reaction or cause and effect. Through wisdom alone the individual can transcend this law and rise above the dualities of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and realize his immortal nature.

The idea of immortality necessarily presupposes our pre-existence, since eternity cannot extend in one direction alone. It is evident that that which has no end can have no beginning. As this present life will be a pre-existence for our future life, so in the same way, the present must have been preceded by other lives. The Self is always the same in past, present and future; but only when our heart unfolds, do we perceive Its everlasting glory and thus conquer our last enemy, death.

YOGA.

The practical part of the teaching of Vedanta is called Yoga, which literally

means "joining" or union between the lower self and higher Self. It offers certain methods for the training of mind and body to make them fit instruments for the manifestation of the perfection already in every human being. When the limited apparent man finds his limitless Self within and unites himself with it, he becomes illumined. Jesus expresses the same idea when He speaks of "communion with God." This method of communion with the Divine is what is meant by Yoga. There is no mystery in it, as many suppose. It is a science entirely based on the direct observation and experience of perfected Yogis, or illumined souls, and is a clear, logical system for the unfoldment of our spiritual nature. It teaches us how to stop frittering our energies unnecessarily and to use them properly for our greatest good. Its main object is to

unite all our mental and physical forces into one strong current, which will carry us to the realization of the Supreme.

Yoga is divided into four principal paths to suit different temperaments :

KARMA YOGA.

Karma Yoga is the path of work and teaches us how to perform all our duties without creating bondage. Activity is an inherent tendency in every living being, but to learn to direct it through the proper channel without waste is the aim of Karma Yoga. A faithful follower of this path works like others, but he gives up all selfish desire and attachment and thereby avoids reaction and suffering. His ideal is to work for the love of the work, without any ulterior motive. If good result comes, he does not take the credit of it, neither does he take on himself the discredit if he fails;

but he offers all the fruits of his actions, both good and bad, unto the Lord, who is the real Doer of all action. This is the secret taught by Sri Krishna in the Gita when He says: "To work we have the right but not to the fruits thereof." He who knows this secret, to him every action becomes an act of worship and leads him to the highest realization.

RAJA YOGA.

Raja Yoga teaches us how to control both our internal and external nature. The first step is to govern the forces which manifest through our physical body and focus them into one. Through this we gain proper balance or perfect health in our outer nature. Health is absolutely necessary for our spiritual growth, since the body is the instrument for the manifestation of the spirit and if not in proper condition, becomes

an obstacle. Therefore the Yogis have prescribed certain postures and methods of breathing, through which we may purify our system and prevent disease.

The next and more important step is to control our mind and senses, or internal nature. This is done through the practice of concentration and meditation. The study of Raja Yoga thus leads us gradually from the grosser to the subtler forces of our organism and shows us how to bring them under our control and unite them into one concentrated energy. The purpose of this, however, is not merely to bring health or psychic power, but to gain absolute self-mastery.

BHAKTI YOGA.

Bhakti Yoga is the path of love and devotion. It is the most natural path to follow, because we all have love in our hearts. As long as this love is given to

the changeable and ephemeral things of this world, so long it causes us disappointment, suffering and bondage; but when it is withdrawn from these and turned towards God, then it becomes Bhakti. Hence Bhakti Yoga teaches us how we can direct all our emotion and feeling toward the Supreme, who is the source of all beauty and bliss. Since He is the one eternal and unchangeable Being, in Him alone we can find unbroken happiness. Thus Bhakti means devotion to God; attachment to any worldly object is not Bhakti. This ideal love is almost inconceivable as long as there is thirst for money, name, fame, power, or sense pleasure; but when all trace of selfishness and worldly desire is wiped out, we realize that nothing external or transitory can satisfy the hunger of our heart, but that He is the only object worthy to be loved.

To a devotee God is not a mere theory or abstract ideal, but an actual living Being, with whom he communes and with whom he bears a definite relation, such as of child, or friend, or servant. All these relationships are established in order that we may feel that we have a claim on God and a sense of nearness to Him. Love has wonderful uniting power and when this Divine love dawns in the heart of the devotee, he feels in direct touch with the Ideal and his every thought, word and action is offered as a service to the Beloved.

JNANA YOGA.

Jnana Yoga is the path of philosophic discrimination and is especially suited to those of intellectual tendency. Its aim is to find the luminous spirit within, for a *Jnani* does not accept any other God than his own Self, which is the

Self of all. This is accomplished through the process of "Neti, Neti," "Not this, Not this," or by distinguishing the real from the unreal, the true from the false. In order to find this cosmic ego or universal Self, he first removes all limited egoism, differentiating himself from the body, mind, senses and all the gross objects of this perishable world. This can only be done by the constant rigid denial of the lower self, but he who perseveres with earnestness and determination will gradually leave behind him all the unrealities of the phenomenal universe and find his true Self within. Then he is able to declare with conviction "I am He," "I am the Truth," "I am the Absolute Brahman," "I and my Father are one."

It does not necessarily mean that because there are four distinct methods, we

cannot combine all in our practice of Yoga. No character is perfect which is lacking in any of these. In fact, we cannot follow one successfully without the help of the others. Nobody can be a true worker without having discrimination, self-control and devotion to his work. Neither can one become a true lover without possessing properly-directed activity, right judgment and self-control. Therefore all these must go hand in hand. But in every character one tendency invariably predominates and that determines the special path. But we must bear in mind that all these paths lead to the same goal.

UNIVERSALITY OF VEDANTA.

“As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their waters in the great sea; similarly, the different paths which men take

through different tendencies, however divergent they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee, O Lord."

From the crudest form of symbol-worship to the loftiest conception of abstract truth, every phase of religion has a place in the religion of Vedanta. It enables a dualist to find his highest ideal of self-surrender at the feet of the Lord; and a monist to realize his true Self within as the Self of all, without depending on any external form of God.

An Infinite Being must be both with form and without form. The sages define Him as unknown and unknowable, because it is impossible for the finite mind to comprehend the Infinite fully. Therefore the teaching of Vedanta never labels the path of God by one name or sect, but recognizes the necessity for innumerable forms of worship to suit the varying degrees of development among

human beings. It does not interfere with any man's natural way of thinking, but furthers his growth by lending him a sympathetic and helping hand wherever he stands. It accepts all the Sacred Scriptures of the world and bows down in reverence before all Saviours and prophets. It believes that the same Gospel of Truth is preached by all, the only difference is that of language and not of the essential meaning. There is, therefore, no room for proselytizing in Vedanta.

It teaches each one how to attain the highest in his own religion, but tells him that he must allow the same privilege to his brother, who may be following some other apparently different path. In the religion of Vedanta all are children of God and have equal claim on Him. Thus it leaves no place for dissensions; but seeing the one Divine

Power behind all forms of worship, it proclaims universal tolerance and assimilation, and to all mankind gives this benediction :

“May He who is Jehovah of the Jews, Father in Heaven of the Christians, Allah of the Mohammedans, Buddha of the Buddhists, Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, and Divine Mother and Brahman of the Hindus, grant unto all peace and blessing. Peace! Peace! Peace be unto us and to all living beings!”

“Vedanta is the most sublime of all philosophies, and the most comforting of all religions.”

Prof. Max Muller.

“On the tree of Indian wisdom there is no fairer flower than the Upanishads, no finer fruit than the Vedanta philosophy.”

Paul Deussen.

“When we read with attention the poetical and philosophical monuments of the East, above all, those of India, which are beginning to spread in Europe, we discover there many a truth, and truths so profound, and which make such a contrast with the meanness of the results at which the European genius has sometimes stopped, that we are constrained to bend the knee before the philosophy of the East, and to see in this cradle of the human race the native land of the highest philosophy.”

Victor Cousin.

“Even the loftiest philosophy of the Europeans, the idealism of reason, as it is set forth by Greek philosophers, appears in comparison with the abundant light and vigor of Oriental idealism, like a feeble Promethean spark in the full flood of heavenly glory of the noonday

sun—faltering and feeble, and ever ready to be extinguished.”

Frederich Schlegel.

“What extracts from the Vedas I have read, fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum,—free from particulars, simple, universal. The Vedas contain a sensible account of God.”

Thoreau.

“In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads (Vedanta). It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death.”

Schopenhauer.

“If philosophy is meant to be a preparation for a happy death, or Euthanasia, I know of no better preparation for it than the Vedanta philosophy.”

Prof. Max Muller.

“The history of Indian philosophy is the abridged history of the philosophy of the world.”

Victor Cousin.

"It is impossible to read the Vedanta, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India."

Sir William Jones.

"Indeed, if I may be allowed the anachronism, the Hindus were Spinozites more than 2,000 years before the existence of Spinoza; and Darwinians many centuries before Darwin; and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution was accepted by the scientists of our time, and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world."

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"To say nothing of Indian Sages to whom evolution was a familiar notion, ages before Paul of Tarsus was born."

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